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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE, NSC FOR ABRAMS/WATERS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/25/2017  
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SUBJECT: ASSESSMENT OF FATAH-HAMAS CLASHES AND PASF  
EFFECTIVENESS

CLASSIFIED BY: CONSUL GENERAL JAKE WALLS, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. FACTIONAL CLASHES THAT FLARED MAY 13-18 DEMONSTRATED THE WILLINGNESS OF PALESTINIAN SECURITY FORCES (PASF) TO FIGHT HARD TO DEFEND MAJOR INSTALLATIONS, BUT ALSO SHOWCASED SUBSTANTIAL HAMAS ADVANTAGES IN TACTICS, EQUIPMENT AND MOTIVATION. END SUMMARY.

#### METHODOLOGY

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¶2. (C) THIS CABLE PROVIDES A CONGEN JERUSALEM ANALYSIS OF RECENT CLASHES IN GAZA, BASED ON INTERVIEWS WITH PASF COMMANDERS, PUBLIC COMMENTS BY FACTION SPOKESMEN, ARABIC-LANGUAGE MEDIA REPORTS, OBSERVATIONS OF GAZA-BASED POLITICAL AND SECURITY CONTACTS, AND STATISTICS COMPILED BY OFFICIAL PA SOURCES. ASSESSMENTS ARE BASED ON COMMON THEMES DERIVED FROM COMPARING ACCOUNTS FROM MULTIPLE, CREDIBLE SOURCES.

#### KEY CONCLUSIONS

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¶3. (C) A) HAMAS HELD THE INITIATIVE IN ALL SIGNIFICANT CLASHES, MAINTAINING AN OFFENSIVE POSTURE WHILE PASF SUCCESSES WERE LIMITED TO DEFENSIVE ACTIONS. HAMAS MADE NO SERIOUS ATTEMPTS TO OVERRUN THE NATIONAL SECURITY FORCES (NSF) HQ, PRESIDENTIAL COMPOUND OR OTHER MAJOR PASF INSTALLATIONS (EXCEPT FOR THE KARNI/AL-MINTAR PG TRAINING AREA IN INITIAL FIGHTING), WHICH WERE WELL-DEFENDED BY THE NSF AND PG. HAMAS FOCUSED ON ELIMINATING THE FATAH/PASF LEADERSHIP, KILLING SENIOR AL-AQSA BRIGADES LEADER BAHAA, A JARAD ON MAY 13 AND ATTACKING THE HOMES OF RASHID ABU SHBAK (KILLING SIX OF HIS BODYGUARDS) AND MAHER MIQDAD. AS DISCUSSED IN PARA. 9, HAMAS HAS BEEN RUTHLESS IN TARGETING PSO, TANZIM AND MUKHABARAT OFFICERS IN THE PAST YEAR.

B) THE FATAH & SPECIAL FORCE8 (COMMANDED BY ABU SAMHADANA), PREVENTIVE SECURITY (PSO) AND TANZIM, WHICH WERE THE ONLY FATAH FORCES OPERATING EXTENSIVELY OUTSIDE OF PASF INSTALLATIONS IN AN OFFENSIVE MODE, SUFFERED HEAVY LOSSES IN EARLY CLASHES WITH THE HAMAS MILITARY-WING AND "EXECUTIVE FORCE.8" THEY DID NOT TAKE POSSESSION OF ANY SIGNIFICANT HAMAS POSITIONS.

C) THE NSF CONDUCTED MOST OF THE DEFENSIVE AND REINFORCING ACTIONS FOR PASF AND FATAH-ALIGNED MILITIAS. THE PG WERE A RELATIVE NON-FACTOR (STRICTLY DEFENDING THEIR POSITIONS IN A PROFESSIONAL AND DISCIPLINED MANNER) IN FACTIONAL CLASHES AFTER THE MAY 15 ATTACK ON THEIR TRAINING BASE AT KARNI/AL-MINTAR. THE CIVIL POLICE WERE GENERALLY UNINVOLVED IN PASF-HAMAS FIGHTING. THE GI (MUKHABARAT) SUPPLIED THE NSF AND PSO WITH ARMAMENTS BUT WAS GENERALLY UNINVOLVED IN

## CLASHES.

D) MOST OF THE RECENT FIGHTING TOOK PLACE IN GAZA CITY AND NORTHERN GAZA (WITH A FEW CLASHES IN RAFAH). UNTIL RELATIVELY LATE IN FIGHTING, KHAN YUNIS AND DAYR AL-BALAH DID NOT EXPERIENCE SIGNIFICANT DISRUPTIONS.

## CASUALTIES

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¶4. (SBU) 56 PALESTINIANS WERE KILLED IN FACTIONAL CLASHES (NOT COUNTING ANY KILLED BY ISRAELI FIRE) MAY 13-22, AND 289 WERE INJURED. FIGURES RELEASED BY THE PA HEALTH MINISTRY (TRACKING INFORMAL CONGEN TALLIES) INDICATE 23 HAMAS KILLED (INCLUDING MILITARY-WING, &EXECUTIVE FORCE8 AND HAMAS ACTIVISTS), 29 FATAH/PASF KILLED (INCLUDING AL-AQSA/TANZIM AND FATAH ACTIVISTS) AND 4 NON-COMBATANTS KILLED. FATAH/PASF DEATHS ARE BROKEN DOWN AS FOLLOWS:

-- NSF: 13  
-- FATAH SPECIAL FORCE/PSO: 12  
-- AL-AQSA BRIGADES AND ASSOCIATED MILITIAS: 4

## ARMAMENTS

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¶5. (C) PASF COMMANDERS IN GAZA FREQUENTLY COMPLAIN OF INADEQUATE SERVICEABLE RIFLES AND PISTOLS AND CHRONIC AMMUNITION SHORTAGES. WHILE THESE COMPLAINTS ARE UNIFORM AND CREDIBLE, THE SHORTAGES DO NOT SEEM TO HAVE BEEN DECISIVE IN THE RECENT CLASHES. HAMAS TACTICS INDICATE THEIR FORCES HAD PLENTIFUL AMMUNITION, SINCE HIGH-VOLUME, MULTI-DIRECTIONAL MACHINE GUN FIRE WAS A STANDARD HAMAS OFFENSIVE TACTIC AGAINST PASF POSITIONS.

¶6. (C) THE KALESHNIKOV 7.62MM RIFLE (AK-47 AND VARIANTS) WAS THE PRINCIPAL FIGHTING WEAPON OF BOTH SIDES, THOUGH BOTH

SIDES ALSO USED SMALL NUMBERS OF M16 RIFLES. (NOTE: THE M16S ARE LIKELY STOLEN OR PURCHASED FROM ISRAELIS OR SMUGGLED FROM EGYPT. END NOTE). THE NSF, PG AND TANZIM HAVE A SMALL NUMBER OF SNIPER RIFLES, AS DOES HAMAS. SECURITY CONTACTS REPORT HAMAS USED SNIPER RIFLES AT NIGHT IN SOME INSTANCES, SUGGESTING A SMALL NUMBER OF STARLIGHT SCOPES OR OTHER FIRST GENERATION NIGHT-VISION SETS. (NOTE: EMBASSY ARMY ATTACHE REPORTS THE IDF HAS HAD SOME OF THESE SYSTEMS STOLEN OR LOST OVER THE YEARS. HAMAS COULD ALSO HAVE IMPORTED SOME NIGHT-VISION SETS THROUGH RAFAH-AREA TUNNELS. END NOTE).

¶7. (C) BOTH SIDES POSSESS 12.7MM HEAVY MACHINE GUNS, ALTHOUGH HAMAS USED THESE IN OFFENSIVE ROLES, POSTING THEM ON ROOFTOPS TO FIRE ON PASF BASES AND MOUNTING THEM ON VEHICLES, WHILE THE PASF USED THEM FOR DEFENSE OF FIXED INSTALLATIONS. BOTH SIDES EMPLOYED RPGS (BOTH SMUGGLED MILITARY GRADE AND IMPROVISED), ALTHOUGH HAMAS USED THEM IN MUCH LARGER NUMBERS. THE HAMAS MILITARY-WING USED IMPROVISED ANTI-ARMOR ROCKETS (&AL-YASSIN8) AGAINST FATAH POSITIONS, BUT PRIMARILY USED THEM AGAINST ISRAELI FORCES. HAMAS AND FATAH BOTH EMPLOYED ROADSIDE AND BURIED EXPLOSIVE CHARGES DURING THE FIGHTING TO DEADLY EFFECT. THE GAZA NSF REPORTEDLY HAS A FEW MORTARS IN ITS INVENTORY, BUT MORTARS SEEM TO HAVE BEEN USED EXCLUSIVELY BY HAMAS DURING THE FIGHTING AND WERE A STANDARD WEAPON IN HAMAS ATTACKS AGAINST FATAH POSITIONS. (NOTE: USSC ALLIED-NATION OFFICERS NOTE THAT MOST HAMAS MORTARS ARE IMPROVISED AND PERHAPS NOT HIGHLY ACCURATE. END NOTE).

## TACTICS EMPLOYED

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¶8. (C) HAMAS FORCES EXECUTED WELL-PLANNED, DELIBERATE ATTACKS ON THEIR TARGETS BY FIRST SEIZING OVERLOOKS AND ROOFTOPS (ESPECIALLY ON HIGH-RISE BUILDINGS) AND BLOCKING ROAD ACCESS, LAUNCHING MORTAR BARRAGES (OFTEN ACCOMPANIED BY RPG FIRE), AND THEN LAYING ON HIGH VOLUMES OF MACHINE GUN FIRE FROM MULTIPLE DIRECTIONS TO SUPPORT GUNMEN ASSIGNED TO ASSAULT A TARGET BUILDING. THESE TACTICS, MINUS THE ASSAULT, WERE USED AT THE PRESIDENTIAL COMPOUND, TAL AL-HAWA PSO HQ, AND GENERAL INTELLIGENCE HQ, BUT WERE NOT FOLLOWED BY ANY

SERIOUS ATTEMPT TO OVERRUN THESE COMPOUNDS. HAMAS USED SIMILAR TACTICS IN A DEFENSIVE ROLE TO PROTECT THE ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY COMPOUND AND AL-NUR HIGH-RISE TOWER (HOME TO SEVERAL HAMAS LEADERS AND OFFICES).

¶9. (C) HAMAS ACCELERATED ITS CAMPAIGN OF TARGETING PASF AND FATAH MILITIA LEADERS (PARTICULARLY THOSE OF THE PSO, TANZIM AND MUKHABARAT) DURING RECENT FIGHTING, PRESSURING BOTH RASHID ABU SHBAK AND SENIOR FATAH COMMANDER SAMIR MASHARAWI TO STAY IN RAMALLAH RATHER THAN DIRECT OPERATIONS IN GAZA. GAZA CONTACTS SUGGEST LACK OF COORDINATION BETWEEN PASF AND FATAH FORCES, WHILE HAMAS EXERCISED MORE EFFECTIVE COMMAND AND CONTROL. (NOTE: HAMAS HAS ASSASSINATED OR ATTEMPTED TO KILL A FEW DOZEN SENIOR PSO AND MUKHABARAT OFFICERS SINCE MUKHABARAT CHIEF TARIQ ABU RAJAB WAS NEARLY KILLED AND PERMANENTLY DISABLED BY A HAMAS ELEVATOR BOMB IN MAY 2006. THIS CAMPAIGN OF ASSASSINATIONS, ABDUCTIONS AND THREATS HAS SUBSTANTIALLY DEGRADED PASF EFFECTIVENESS IN COLLECTING INFORMATION ON AND COMBATING HAMAS, AND EFFECTIVELY EXILED SEVERAL PSO AND MUKHABARAT COMMANDERS FROM GAZA. END NOTE).

¶10. (C) GAZA SECURITY CONTACTS SUGGEST THE NSF WAS THE LEAD DEFENSIVE FORCE IN NEARLY ALL CASES AND AGGRESSIVELY RETURNED RIFLE, MACHINE GUN AND RPG FIRE AT HAMAS ATTACKERS AND FIRE SUPPORT POSITIONS. THE NSF AND OTHER PASF/FATAH FORCES GENERALLY REMAINED IN FIXED LOCATIONS, CONCENTRATING ON HOLDING KEY COMPOUNDS. THEY DID NOT ATTEMPT SIGNIFICANT OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS OR OPERATE AWAY FROM THE IMMEDIATE VICINITY OF THEIR BASES IN GAZA CITY. CONTACT ACCOUNTS SUGGEST HAMAS FORCES ENJOYED GREATER FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT IN GAZA CITY AND SURROUNDING AREAS. BOTH AT KARNI/AL-MINTAR AND AROUND THE MAIN GAZA CITY SECURITY COMPOUNDS, NSF UNITS SEEM TO HAVE FOUGHT DISCIPLINED AND EFFECTIVE DEFENSIVE CLASHES DESPITE SUFFERING MANY CASUALTIES (AT KARNI/AL-MINTAR, ISRAELI FIRE TOWARD THE HAMAS ATTACKERS WAS LIKELY ALSO A FACTOR IN THE PASF'S DEFENSIVE SUCCESS). IN A FEW CASES, THE NSF LED COUNTER-ASSAULTS AGAINST BUILDINGS HAMAS WAS USING AS FIRING PLATFORMS, AND EVEN PUSHED EXECUTIVE FORCE8 FIGHTERS OUT OF THEIR AL-WIDHA STREET "BADR BASE," A FEW HUNDRED METERS FROM THE NSF HQ, AL-SARAYA.

USSC AND DAO COMMENT

¶11. (C) EMBASSY TEL AVIV ARMY ATTACHE COMMENT: AS IN JANUARY'S FIGHTING IN THE WEST BANK, FATAH MILITANTS (INCLUDING THE TANZIM) AND THE NEWLY-CREATED GAZA "SPECIAL FORCES" UNIT (A TERM COINED BY MUHAMMAD DAHLAN) MAY HAVE BEEN THE REAL STALWARTS IN A LOT OF THE FIGHTING. THIS WILL NOT

BODE WELL FOR EFFORTS TO PROFESSIONALIZE THE PASF AND OR REMOVE MILITIA MEMBERS FROM THE PASF PAYROLL. MOREOVER, THE GOI HAS CLAIMED THAT THE PSO GARNERED LARGE STOCKS OF WEAPONS WHEN THE BORDER WALL WITH EGYPT WAS BREACHED LAST SUMMER DURING DISENGAGEMENT. IF THIS WAS IN FACT THE CASE, WE QUESTION WHY THE PSO CANNOT SUPPLY ARMS TO THE PASF TO OFFSET THE REPORTED IMBALANCES WITH HAMAS, ESPECIALLY DURING TIMES OF CONFLICT AS THE MUKHABARAT REPORTEDLY DID OF LATE.

¶12. (C) USSC DEPUTY COMMANDER COMMENT: FATAH/PASF COMMANDERS CONSIDERED THE NSF TO BE THE LIONS OF THE FIGHT. THERE ARE THREE POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS FOR THE REPORTED LACK OF PASF OFFENSIVE ACTION: A) RASHID ABU SHBAK LACKED THE WILL OR IMAGINATION TO CONDUCT AN OFFENSIVE, AND/OR HELD BACK NSF COMMANDER JAMAL KAYYAD FROM DOING SO; B) PRESIDENT ABBAS ORDERED PASF COMMANDERS TO HOLD THEIR GROUND BUT NOT ESCALATE FIGHTING TO AVOID DESCENT INTO FULL CIVIL WAR; AND C) THE PASF WERE INCAPABLE OF OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS DUE TO POOR MORALE/NO SALARIES OR LACK OF NECESSARY RESOURCES. THE TIMING OF HAMAS' QASSAM CAMPAIGN DURING THE FIGHTING AND THE SPLIT BETWEEN HAMAS' POLITICAL AND MILITARY WINGS, ARE ALSO FACTORS THAT WARRANT ANALYSIS AND IMPACT THE ABOVE CONCLUSIONS.

WALLES